Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food

Farm & Food Report

Communications Branch, Walter Scott Building
3085 Albert Street, Regina, Canada, S4S 0B1

Saskatchewan

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Log Number: 06-33-148
Week of August 14, 2006

NEW PARTNERSHIP STEMS FROM BSE RESEARCH FUNDING

A research project at the University of Saskatchewan Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization (VIDO), originally funded by Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food, is receiving additional support from PrioNet Canada, a network of centres of excellence funded by Industry Canada.

The project is aimed at finding a vaccine to control BSE in cattle, and variants of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) in large mammals such as elk and deer.

"Our goal is to get something out there that producers can choose to use where they feel it is appropriate," said Andy Potter, vaccinologist and associate director of research at VIDO.

Ultimately, Potter feels that if an effective BSE vaccine can be delivered, "it may strengthen perceptions in the export market."

The vaccine would target prion diseases, which cause normal animal proteins to change into abnormal forms, accumulating in the animal's system and creating the symptoms of BSE and CWD.

Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food has committed more than $267,000 in funding to the research project over the next three years. PrioNet Canada recently announced a further $292,000 in grants over two years.

PrioNet is mandated by Industry Canada to disseminate a coast-to-coast response to the potential risk of BSE and other prion diseases in Canada. PrioNet Scientific Director Neil Cashman of the University of British Columbia is one of a number of collaborators working with Potter and his group at VIDO.

"Neil identified the site on prions where antibodies bind, and that gave us something to shoot at," said Potter.

The VIDO team working on the vaccine includes a ruminant immunologist and an organic chemist. There are also researchers contributing knowledge from as far away as the Norwegian Veterinary College in Oslo, Norway.

"We have a great team," Potter stated.

(more)

He noted the project is a perfect fit for VIDO, and that it reflects the organization's status as a world-leading research facility in animal infectious diseases and vaccines.

Potter said the target is exciting because it may result in new technology that could vaccinate against BSE, and may actually be able to reduce the abnormal proteins in animals at the early stages of infection.

"We are grateful to Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food and PrioNet for giving us the opportunity to go down this path, and ultimately benefit the producers and the consumer," said Potter.

The BSE vaccine research is linked with another University of Saskatchewan project, which aims to track the patterns of CWD in wild deer populations. By understanding those patterns, researchers will be able to provide cattle producers with information to help them understand the potential risks to their herds posed by infected wild populations.

The VIDO project is fully funded for three years. By that time, Potter expects the team to have the vaccine technology developed to the point that it can be tested in the field.

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For more information, contact:

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INSURANCE OPTIONS FOR FALL-SEEDED CROPS

Producers with acres left unseeded this spring due to excess moisture may be considering seeding a winter cereal crop this autumn. For those who want to manage the risk of fall-seeded acres, Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation provides winterkill, spring establishment and yield-loss coverage on fall rye and winter wheat.

Winterkill coverage is a separate coverage option. Producers have until August 25 to select winterkill insurance for fall rye and winter wheat crops seeded on or before September 15. The premium for this option will appear on their Statement of Insurance in 2007.

"Optimum seeding dates are between the last week of August and the first week of September, depending on your area," said Saskatchewan Crop Insurance agrologist Chris Stewart. "Seeding typically extends over a month, from mid-August to mid-September."

He added, "Crop Insurance recognizes that the winter cereal manual indicates the ideal seeding date for winter cereals is between August 27 and September 6. However, our policy allows producers to seed until September 15 in the event of less-than-ideal conditions."

Winterkill coverage on winter wheat is available in southwestern risk zones three, four and 10, and in northeastern RMs 394, 395, 426, 456 and 486, if seeded into stubble, summerfallow or chemfallow.

Coverage is available outside these areas if seeded into undisturbed standing stubble or chemfallow, but only if there is sufficient stubble (minimum of six inches or 15 centimetres) to trap enough snow to insulate the crop.

"Six inches of stubble is a requirement of coverage outside those designated areas," said Stewart. "It's necessary to help keep the crown of the plant at a survivable temperature throughout the winter."

Acres that do not qualify for winterkill coverage, or that were not selected for winterkill coverage by the deadline, may still be eligible for yield-loss coverage in 2007 if they establish in the spring. Crops seeded in the fall of 2006 and insured against yield-loss by March 31, 2007 will be covered for spring-related establishment losses. Those acres will be inspected to determine if they qualify for the establishment payment of $20 per acre.

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Producers with any questions about insuring fall-seeded crops should contact their customer service office or call 1-888-935-0000.

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For more information, contact:

Chris Stewart, Agricultural Specialist
Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation
Phone: (306) 728-7284

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ORGANIC GROWTH AT GALARNEAU FARMS

When Alex and Robert Galarneau's father first started looking into organic farming, it was 1981, and not quite the readily accepted practice it is today.

"We got called a lot of things," son Alex recalls, "but 'trailblazers' wasn't one of them."

Alex says he grew along with the industry, working in organic farming since he was 17 years old. Over the last 25 years, the Galarneau farm has gone from a family business to an organic farming and processing business, with nine employees on the payroll and 87 producers on contract.

Alex describes the choice to go organic on the farm as an important matter of diversification.

"Back in the early 1980s, we were fifty-fifty fallow. We knew we would have to go with high inputs or branch off…so we branched off."

Alex says what the family didn't like about their farm business at the time was that they were always dependent on prices and costs that were out of their control. They investigated what was then called "chemical free grain" and decided it offered better control of their own resources, and possibly a better way to make a living from farming.

Galarneau Farms was one of the first to bring organic certification to Saskatchewan, and that certification put them on the map. Other producers who were attracted to the organic market didn't always want to handle the marketing aspects, and Galarneau Farms became known as the people to ask.

"We were always out there, ready to share information," says Alex. "Some people didn't want to do their own marketing, so they relied on our expertise."

It's expertise that pays to know: Alex says every farm working with them can generally be guaranteed a profit on an average crop year.

"We're very free with our information," says Alex. "We always have people coming in and asking for advice on how to get started, whether they should (get into the business), that kind of thing."

(more)

Alex says for producers considering branching off into organic production, there are some very important considerations.

"You have got to question *why*. If it's because you're already experiencing financial hardship, I don't know if this will help."

The Galarneaus' marketing expertise also helped them expand into processing of all crops. Today, their facility in Radville does primary cleaning and bagging of hard red spring wheat, kamut, oilseeds and other grains. Alex estimates they market for a land base of approximately 40,000 to 50,000 acres.

The hottest market for Galarneau Farms' product right now is Europe. European markets account for about 80 per cent of their business, as opposed to opportunities in North America, where organics still have some catching up to do.

"Europe is a more mature market," says Alex. "We are still realizing substantial growth in Europe, whereas North America is just kicking into high gear."

Alex estimates that Galarneau Farms' products, especially the kamut wheat, are found in 1,500 different products, from the familiar (pastas and bread) to the new (a variety of kamut-based milk launched in Europe in February 2006).

For more information, contact:

Alex Galarneau or Robert Galarneau
PHS Organics/Galarneau Farms
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CENTURY FAMILY FARM AWARD HONOURS GREAT LEGACIES

Saskatchewan has witnessed some remarkable contributions from its citizens over its 100-plus year history – none greater than those of its agricultural producers.

With the province now embarking on its second century, an increasing number of family farms around the province are similarly approaching their 100th anniversaries.

The Province of Saskatchewan created the Century Family Farm Award as a way to acknowledge and honour residents preparing to celebrate these historic milestones.

Since the program's inception in 1981, these awards have been presented to hundreds of Saskatchewan families.

"The Century Family Farm Award is a wonderful tribute to the pioneers who helped settle this province, and to their descendants who have worked hard for so many years to continue building upon their legacies," said Ellen Harder, the co-ordinator of the award program with Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food.

"It's a way for the people of Saskatchewan to say 'thank you' to families who have contributed so much to this province over the years," she added. "And the pride you see on the faces of those receiving the award shows just how special it is to them."

The Trimble family of Elstow is one of those proud recipients.

Charlotte Trimble and her husband Don Hartz are the third generation to work the family farm that was settled by her grandfather Luther Trimble in 1906.

"We love Saskatchewan and we love the land," Trimble said. "While it's taken a lot of work and a lot of guts over the years, we're very proud of what's been accomplished on our farm over the past century. Receiving this honour was just the icing on the cake."

Application forms for the Century Family Farm Award can be found on the Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food website at www.agr.gov.sk.ca under Forms/General, or by using the website's Search function.

(more)

Hard copies of the form can also be obtained by contacting Ellen Harder at (306) 787-5216, or the Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food Agriculture Knowledge Centre at 1-866-457-2377.

In order for a farming operation to be eligible, members of the same family must have farmed the land continuously for 100 years or more. Applicants are responsible for providing a written history of family ownership and/or verifying information offering reasonable proof of operation along with the application.

The family must live in Saskatchewan and continue to operate the farm. Applicants are eligible for one award per family.

Recipients have the option of receiving an etched glass figure, an indoor wall plaque, or a gate sign (for an additional fee). Certificates marking the honour may also be presented to family members as determined by the eligible family.

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For more information, contact:

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FAMILY FARM ENTERPRISE A "SPINNING SUCCESS"

Approximately 30 kilometres between Biggar and Rosetown is a picturesque farm perched on the top of a hill, surrounded by a beautiful rolling valley dotted with sheep, and a lovely, secluded dam in the middle of the sea of green grass.

Sheila Sperling-Law, her husband Fred, and their family are the owners and operators of this scenic farm. Along with it, they run Prairie Fibre Mill, the only fibre mill in Saskatchewan, as well as a retail shop.

Needless to say, with so much on the go, the entire family is kept extremely busy.

Sheila can normally be found in the barn working with the spinning equipment. This tall, slim woman with her down-to-earth manner and dimpled smile radiates vitality, purpose and determination.

She said, "In '98, Fred and I moved to my home area after living in Alberta for 18 years. Fred had never been in Saskatchewan before the day we arrived with all of our belongings. We purchased a small acreage and bought five bred ewes. Fred, my mother and I started to hand spin."

They started out small, hand spinning and knitting items for trade fairs and craft shows. Most buyers were not interested in the hand spinning as much as the hand knitting, so they had some of their fibre spun at a commercial mill.

After growing tired of waiting months for their fibre to be processed, the Law family decided to look at starting their own mill.

On July 20, 2005, they received their shipment of custom equipment and underwent one week of training. By the end of September, the custom work got going.

They now process wool from sheep, bison, alpaca, llama and rabbit, as well as other fibres. Demand for their skills has proven to be incredible—so much so that they are currently almost three months behind in their custom yarn-making business.

"We advertise by word of mouth, and have customers from B.C. to Ontario," said Sheila. "They will either send their wool to us by bus or deliver it in person. Some people make a vacation out of the trip."

(more)

Attached to the barn/workshop is the retail store, a very quaint, homey place that may very well entice you to pick up some needles and start knitting.

The store boasts a variety of products, several of which are homemade by the Law family, as well as items featured for sale by other local artists and artisans.

The Laws own 55 Merino and 65 Shetland sheep, from which they sell wool through their store and meat at the farm gate. Among the goods offered for purchase are yarn, roves, quilt batting and felts. The wool is also available as value-added products, including sweaters, socks, hats and mittens, as well as stuffed toys, saddle blankets, mitten inserts and wall hangings made of felt.

The Law family farm is not connected to the provincial power grid, but generates its own electricity to run the entire operation. A generator is used to drive the mill equipment, and a heat exchanger heats the barn and loft areas in the winter months. The generator also charges huge batteries that are used to power the barn and to store power so that the generator is not running all the time. Solar panels on the house roof and a small windmill provide power for the house, including the hot water heater.

The Prairie Fibre Mill is indeed a special place to visit. "Our store is open from 8:00 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. every weekday and on Saturday," Sheila said. "If customers are unable to come during those hours, they are welcome to give us a call for other arrangements."

She also noted that the family is very happy to offer individual and group tours of its unique operation.

"We run tours through the lambing barns, and have a hands-on demonstration of different fibre types. Then we demonstrate drop spinning and hand spinning, tour the mill and make a small felt project," she stated.

Tours can be arranged by calling (in advance, please) (306) 882-4542 or e-mailing themill@sasktel.net. There is a small charge of $5 per person.

"We are so pleased to be living here and to offer the services of our mill to fibre producers," Sheila said. "Come for a visit!"

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For more information, contact:

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